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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000833

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [HO](#)
SUBJECT: NATIONAL PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE MARIO
CANAHUATI CLAIMS CONSPIRACY AND FRAUD

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Simon Henshaw, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (C) Summary: National Party presidential candidate Mario Canahuati paid a courtesy call on Charge on September 9. He accused National Party rival Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo of pressuring the Supreme Electoral Tribunal to accept two other National Party candidates (to split opposition) and of generally conspiring against him. Canahuati expressed a deep fear that fraud would be perpetrated against him, but said he could accept defeat if the process was free and transparent. Charge reaffirmed USG commitment to supporting a free and fair primary election on November 16 and reiterated USG support for international observers, who could deter attempts at fraud. Canahuati expressed his appreciation for USG efforts. End Summary.

Accuses National Party of Working Against Him

¶2. (C) Mario Canahuati, former Honduran Ambassador to the United States and National Party presidential candidate, paid a courtesy call on Charge on September 9 with his vice presidential Candidate Rossana Guevara. He recounted that his motivation for entering politics was to work toward real change in Honduras, and that he was using only family funds, and no outside donations, for his campaign. He added that Guevara had given up a 30-year career in journalism to join him because she believed in his plan for the future. His main complaint, however, was that the internal National Party machine was controlled by Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo and that the party was plotting against him to keep him out of power. Canahuati accused Lobo of having convinced the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) to accept the candidacies of two additional National Party candidates besides Canahuati and Lobo: Jesus Flores and Mario Facusse. Canahuati said both Flores and Facusse have some following and by allowing their candidacies, Lobo took away any chance the two would ally with him against Lobo. Canahuati said that neither Flores nor Facusse had the requisite number of complete party slates (150) and that neither candidate should have been accepted by the TSE. When PolCouns mentioned that the TSE must publish the slates, Canahuati responded that the TSE should have published the slates by August 25th, but has been delinquent, thus giving both candidates extra time to fill in the blanks and produce proper slates.

We Can Accept Defeat if the Process is Fair

13. (C) Canahuati and Guevara said the most important issue for them was to ensure a free and fair election: if they were beaten fairly by Lobo, then they offered that they could accept defeat graciously. If there is fraud on November 16, however, they and their followers will not participate in the general elections. (Note: Most polls show Canahuati with approximately 20 percent of the National Party vote. But if his followers do not go to the polls for next year's general elections, they might swing the election in the favor of the Liberal Party candidate. End Note.) Canahuati added he was concerned that Lobo had made a deal with the Liberal party to control the computers that would process the voting results and feared fraud could be perpetrated on election day. Canahuati said he was willing to work with Lobo to unite the party after the primaries, but had to be secure the vote was free and fair. Charge reaffirmed the USG commitment to supporting a free and transparent primary election, agreeing that the primary is as important as the general election. He added that international election observers who relayed a "quick count" to a central election observation center could play a strong deterring role at the voting booths. Canahuati responded that he was "relieved" to hear about our support.

U.S.-Honduran Bilateral Relations

14. (C) Canahuati said he has always been pro-USG (Note: Post agrees that his statements have generally supported this assertion. End Note.) He recounted his recent trip to

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Colombia, where he spent a day with Alvaro Uribe, and reiterated that he believes the future of Honduras lies with maintaining strong alliances with the USG and U.S. allies like Colombia. He expressed concern over President Zelaya's move to the left and towards Venezuela and said he would continue to publicize his opinion that Honduras does not need friends like Chavez.

Comment

15. (C) Canahuati was much more subdued than in previous meetings, and appeared appreciative of our efforts to support a free and transparent electoral process. While he claimed to have the support of almost 50 percent of the National Party voters, and questioned the validity of the various polls showing his support to be lower, in our view the polls are fairly accurate. Whatever his final numbers are, however, if, as we expect, he loses and then cannot come to an agreement with Lobo and breaks with the party, he would increase the chance of another Liberal Party victory. End Comment.

HENSHAW